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**Israel must release the captured Hamas officials immediately***Strasbourg, 24/05/2007***Israel must release the captured Hamas officials immediately**

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"The Israeli authorities must show the restraint and realism of a sovereign state and release the democratically elected Hamas representatives that are detained following an IDF raid," declared **Kyriacos Triantaphyllides**, GUE/NGL Chairman of the EP delegation for relations with the PLC, following the large-scale operation conducted this morning by the Israeli army that resulted in the arrest of 33 Hamas officials including the Minister of Education, three Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, four mayors and various municipality heads.

"This is the second time in a year that the Israeli authorities are conducting such an operation. Last year, following the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, they had imprisoned several Hamas members, some of whom are still being held captive" he said.

"It is now time for the European Union to stop taking sides and end its unilateral policy of tolerance towards Israel whilst imposing an embargo on a democratically elected government. The reality on the ground shows us that the Palestinian government of national unity is on the verge of collapsing thanks to the combined efforts of restless militia, excessive use of state force and the European Union's Member States unilateral policies. My thoughts are with the detained officials, some of whom the European Delegation for relations with the Palestinian Legislative Council had met, during its visit twenty days ago".